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Locke, Coast Guard sign agreement to coordinate spill prevention and response

OLYMPIA - Gov. Gary Locke and Coast Guard Rear Adm. Erroll Brown today signed an agreement that will lead to greater federal-state collaboration in preventing and responding to oil spills in Washington's waters.

More than a year ago, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision (in *Intertanko v. State of Washington*) that stripped the state of much of its authority to prevent oil spills. The court ruled that states could not impose their own requirements regarding the design, construction, operation and maintenance of commercial vessels. According to the court, states must abide by the federal standards adopted by the Coast Guard.

Locke and the state Department of Ecology (Ecology) were concerned that the court's decision, combined with budget cuts within the Coast Guard, left Washington's coastline and Puget Sound too vulnerable.

"If the Coast Guard's regulations are the highest level of protection that will be allowed in our state, then we need to make sure they are implemented and enforced to the greatest possible extent," Locke said. "The Coast Guard needs us and we need them - and Puget Sound and the coast need both of us."

About a year ago, Locke and then-U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater agreed that a memorandum of agreement (MOA) would be a good tool for redefining the Coast Guard's and state's working relationship in the wake of *Intertanko*. An interagency team worked to develop that agreement, which was signed today.

The MOA focuses primarily on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of Ecology and the Coast Guard, and decreasing duplicative efforts. In addition to training together, collaborating on pollution-prevention education, and informing each other about violations that are found, the two agencies will develop protocols for sharing information and data; cooperating on vessel inspections; sharing responsibility for monitoring oil-transfer operations; coordinating facility-inspection programs; ensuring that their contingency plans are compatible; planning, scheduling, designing, conducting and evaluating exercises; and collaborating on investigations.

"This MOA recognizes the long-standing commitment both organizations have to protecting the pristine environment of the Pacific Northwest," said Brown. "It enhances our relationship, minimizes duplication of effort, and offers a higher level of protection activities."

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